**Spartacus Educational Classroom Activity**

Was Henry VIII's son, Henry FitzRoy, murdered?

<http://spartacus-educational.com/ExTEU20.htm>

[Henry FitzRoy](http://spartacus-educational.com/Henry_FitzRoy.htm), the son of [Henry VIII](http://spartacus-educational.com/TUDhenry8.htm) and [Bessie Blount](http://spartacus-educational.com/Bessie_Blount.htm), was born near[Ingatestone](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ingatestone) in about June 1519. Although illegitimate, as the king's only male son at the time of his birth he was a valuable asset. He was given the Anglo-Norman surname "FitzRoy" meaning "son of the king" which had been used by several kings of England for their illegitimate children. As[Kelly Hart](http://www.kellyharthistory.com/about.html) has argued that he wanted it to be known he was the father of the child: "A healthy boy was a sign of the king's virility; it was clear now that the lack of a strong son could be blamed on his wife."

Arrangements for his care were initially entrusted to his godfather, Cardinal [Thomas Wolsey](http://spartacus-educational.com/TUDwolseyT.htm). According to his biographer, when he was six years old: "He was created earl of Nottingham and on the same day he received the unprecedented honour of a double dukedom. As duke of Richmond and Somerset he was endowed with lands whose revenues amounted to £4,845 in the first year. On 16 July 1525 he became lord admiral of England."

[Catherine of Aragon](http://spartacus-educational.com/TUDaragon.htm) became concerned when Henry FitzRoy was brought to court in 1527. Rumours began circulating that [Henry VIII](http://spartacus-educational.com/TUDhenry8.htm) was going to divorce Catherine and make his young son his heir instead of his daughter, [Mary](http://spartacus-educational.com/TUDmary1.htm). People began to speculate that Henry had "decided that gender was more important than legitimacy". However, it soon became clear that Henry intended to marry [Anne Boleyn](http://spartacus-educational.com/TUDboleyn.htm) in an effort to obtain an legitimate male heir.

[Henry FitzRoy](http://spartacus-educational.com/Henry_FitzRoy.htm) died suddenly on 22nd July 1536.

##### Primary Sources

**(Source 1)** Henry FitzRoy (c. 1534)



#### (Source 2) [Marie Louise Bruce](http://www.goodreads.com/author/show/226748.Marie_Louise_Bruce), [Anne Boleyn](http://www.amazon.co.uk/s/ref%3Dnb_sb_noss?url=search-alias=stripbooks&field-keywords=Marie%20Louise%20Bruce,%20Anne%20Boleyn&tag=blogccasion) (1972)

Elizabeth Blount, maid of honour to Queen Catherine, had, according to the chronicler Edward Hall, "won the King's heart", a "damsel" who "in singing, dancing and in all goodly pastimes exceeded all other". Her first revel with the King took place in the company of Thomas and George Boleyn, when she was aged at most thirteen, her last, four years later in October 1518. Shortly after this festive occasion Wolsey arranged for her to retire to the Priory of St Lawrence where a boy, Henry FitzRoy, was born about June 1519, and proudly acknowledged by the King to be his son; since when she had not returned to Court.

#### (Source 3) [Kelly Hart](http://www.kellyharthistory.com/about.html), [The Mistresses of Henry VIII](http://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/product/0752458523?ie=UTF8&tag=blogccasion&link_code=as2&camp=2486&creative=8946&creativeASIN=0752458523) (2009)

In spring 1519, Bessie Blount gave birth to Henry FitzRoy, the king's son, at some time between April and June. King Henry was happy to acknowledge the boy, although his existence was not widely known until six years later... A healthy boy was a sign of the king's virility; it was clear now that the lack of a strong son could be blamed on his wife.

#### (Source 4) [Alison Weir](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alison_Weir), [The Six Wives of Henry VIII](http://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/product/0099523620?ie=UTF8&tag=blogccasion&link_code=as2&camp=2486&creative=8946&creativeASIN=0099523620) (2007)

In 1519 she (Bessie Blount) gave birth to the King's bastard son in the house. Henry was delighted to have a boy at last: here was proof indeed that he himself was not responsible for the lack of a male heir, though it must have seemed to him ironical that his only son should be born out of wedlock. He named the child Henry, and bestowed upon him the old Norman-French surname FitzRoy, which means "son of the King". News of the birth soon leaked out at court, and in due course the Queen learned of it, to her sorrow and humiliation.

#### (Source 5) [John Guy](http://www.johnguy.co.uk/biography-john-guy.php), [*Tudor England*](http://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/product/0192852132?ie=UTF8&tag=blogccasion&link_code=as2&camp=2486&creative=8946&creativeASIN=0192852132)(1986)

Henry VIII had no legitimate male heir: the Tudor dynasty was at risk. He and Catherine had a daughter, Princess Mary (born 1516), and he had by Elizabeth Blount an illegitimate son, Henry FitzRoy, whom he created duke of Richmond in 1525.

#### (Source 6) [Jasper Ridley](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/1466429/Jasper-Ridley.html), [*Henry VIII*](http://www.amazon.co.uk/s/ref%3Dnb_sb_noss?url=search-alias%3Dstripbooks&field-keywords=Jasper%20Ridley%2C%20Henry%20VIII&tag=blogccasion) (1984)

When Henry VIII realised that Catherine of Aragon would not produce a son... he considered the possibility of legitimising his legitimate son, Henry FitzRoy Having kept his affair with Elizabeth Blount very quiet, he suddenly publicised it, and made all his subjects aware of the existence of the child of the union.

#### (Source 7) [John Edward Bowle](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Edward_Bowle), [Henry VIII](http://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/product/0715359207?ie=UTF8&tag=blogccasion&link_code=as2&camp=2486&creative=8946&creativeASIN=0715359207) (1964)

The problem of the succession had long haunted Henry's mind, for of Catherine's six children, Mary alone survived, and by 1525 it was clear that the queen was past bearing any more. Mary was the sole legitimate heir... Henry now insulted Catherine by grooming his bastard for the succession. This fine boy by Elizabeth Blount was six years old; he was now brought forward as a potential heir.

#### (Source 8) [David Starkey](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Starkey), [Six Wives: The Queens of Henry VIII](http://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/product/0099437244?ie=UTF8&tag=blogccasion&link_code=as2&camp=2486&creative=8946&creativeASIN=0099437244) (2003)

It came as a brutal shock to Catherine when, in the summer of 1525, she heard that Henry's young bastard, Henry FitzRoy, was to be recognized as the King's son and showered with titles and honours. The boy was installed as Knight of the Garter, created Earl of Nottingham and Duke of Richmond and Somerset (all of them royal titles), and appointed Lord Admiral and Warden-General of the Marches against Scotland.... Such concentration of peerages and great offices had never before being held by a subject, let alone a six-year-old. It could mean one thing only: Henry VIII had decided that gender was more important than legitimacy. Catherine feared that he would recognize Richmond as his heir, and would exclude Mary from her rightful inheritance.

#### (Source 9) [Beverley A Murphy](http://www.amazon.co.uk/s/ref%3Ddp_byline_sr_book_1?ie=UTF8&field-author=Beverley+A+Murphy&search-alias=books-uk&text=Beverley+A+Murphy&sort=relevancerank&tag=blogccasion), [*Elizabeth Blount : Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*](http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/73234?docPos=8)(2004-2014)

The terms of the 1536 Succession Act renewed interest in the possibility of Richmond's succeeding his father. In many respects he was an ideal candidate. Widely reported to be as intelligent, articulate, and as athletic as his father, the danger of a minority was fast receding. His relationship with Henry VIII was consistently good. Numerous gifts and letters were indications of a genuine affection between them.

#### (Source 10) [Alison Weir](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alison_Weir), [The Six Wives of Henry VIII](http://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/product/0099523620?ie=UTF8&tag=blogccasion&link_code=as2&camp=2486&creative=8946&creativeASIN=0099523620) (2007)

When Henry FitzRoy, Duke of Richmond came to bid his father goodnight on the evening after Anne Boleyn's arrest, Henry embraced him and wept as he told him that his half-sister Mary ought to thank God for escaping "that cursed and venomous whore, who tried to poison you both". There was no evidence for this, but Henry was prepared to believe that no crime was too monstrous to have been committed by Anne. And when Richmond died of consumption the following July, Henry and most other people would believe that Anne had administered a slow-working poison which caused his death.

#### (Source 11) [Philippa Jones](http://www.goodreads.com/author/show/2865193.Philippa_Jones), [*The Other Tudors: Henry VIII's Mistresses and Bastards*](http://www.amazon.co.uk/s/ref%3Dnb_sb_noss?url=search-alias%3Dstripbooks&field-keywords=The+Other+Tudors%3A+Henry+VIII%27s+Mistresses+and+Bastards&rh=n%3A266239%2Ck%3AThe+Other+Tudors%3A+Henry+VIII%27s+Mistresses+and+Bastards&tag=blogccasion) (2010)

Richmond is believed to have died of tuberculosis, although the secrecy and speed of his burial might be due to the fact that he died, or was suspected of having died of pneumonic plague. The main symptoms of this are fever, headache, weakness and rapidly developing pneumonia with shortness of breath, chest pain and coughing, all symptoms that Richmond showed before his death. The pneumonia progresses for two to four days with death from respiratory failure and shock. Richmond was only 17... If the illness had been developing for some time, it was probably not plague, but his quick death may have convinced his attendants that it was.

#### (Source 12) [Kelly Hart](http://www.kellyharthistory.com/about.html), [The Mistresses of Henry VIII](http://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/product/0752458523?ie=UTF8&tag=blogccasion&link_code=as2&camp=2486&creative=8946&creativeASIN=0752458523) (2009)

The king had spent a lot of time with his son throughout his childhood and was inconsolable on his death. Henry VIII had always been terrified of death and insisted that Richmond's father-in-law, the duke of Norfolk, organise a quick and private funeral. Henry may have wanted his dead son's corpse taken far away from him...

It is thought that he died of consumption, although it could have been another lung condition. A. S. McNalty, the author of Henry VIII: A Difficult Patient (1952), concludes that there was a history of pulmonary tuberculosis in the Tudors. It allegedly killed both of Henry's sons, Richmond and Edward VI, contributed to the deaths of Henry's father and brother, Henry VII and Prince Arthur, and his daughter Elizabeth may have suffered from tuberculous laryngitis.

#### (Source 13) [Philippa Jones](http://www.goodreads.com/author/show/2865193.Philippa_Jones), [*The Other Tudors: Henry VIII's Mistresses and Bastards*](http://www.amazon.co.uk/s/ref%3Dnb_sb_noss?url=search-alias%3Dstripbooks&field-keywords=The+Other+Tudors%3A+Henry+VIII%27s+Mistresses+and+Bastards&rh=n%3A266239%2Ck%3AThe+Other+Tudors%3A+Henry+VIII%27s+Mistresses+and+Bastards&tag=blogccasion) (2010)

When it came to the treatment of his corpse, the speed of his sickness and death may simply have overwhelmed the King. The death of his beloved son may have devastated his father. He had lost his only son who had died without heirs. Henry's instructions to Norfolk may have been misinterpreted or confused by the chain of instruction, so that the body was roughly coffined and transported by Norfolk's servants.

But why did his father ignore him so completely? This might support the theory that Henry believed that Richmond was part of a planned revolt against the Crown, rising from his powerbase in Lincolnshire. It would not be the first time an heir decided not to wait for his inheritance, and the affair could have been triggered by Jane Seymour's pregnancy.

A living, lawful male child would have put Richmond firmly out of contention for the throne. In fact, there was an uprising in Lincolnshire in September and October 1536, not long after Richmond's death. Would he have supported
this action, had he been alive? Did Henry believe his son had been actively involved in this disturbance? Certainly supporters of the revolt came from South Kyme, Tailboys lands, and the leaders included Bessie Blount's son-in-law, Robert Dymoke, and Richmond's servants, Sir John Russell and Sir William Parr.

##### Questions for Students

Question 1: Read sources 2, 3 and 4. (a) Who was Elizabeth Blount? (b) Why did Henry VIII call his son "Henry FitzRoy"? (c) Why did Henry VIII want people to know he was the father of an illegitimate child?

Question 2: Why was Catherine of Aragon concerned by Henry VIII's actions in 1525?

Question 3: Use the information in the sources to explain the death of Henry FitzRoy on 22nd July 1536.